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## **Chapter 2**

### **WHY WE SHOULD WATCH FOR CHRIST'S RETURN**

This is our first study in what I believe will be an interesting and beneficial series of prophetic studies. We will endeavour to look at God's revelation of the events which He has said will take place just prior to the return of the Saviour to rule this world. We wish to start our series by looking at why we should consider such a subject. Some might believe that it is folly to stare into the future and try to anticipate what will happen amongst the nations at the end of this age. If such a study is folly then the folly began with the Lord Who revealed these things to us and commanded us to give consideration to what He said.

But, in truth, it is a study in which God's people have been engaged since the dawn of time. Please consider just one or two scriptures to illustrate this truth.

"And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days," Genesis 49:1.

There are many things to which a dying father may wish to draw the attention of his sons before he departs. Notice the importance that Jacob placed upon events that would involve his descendants in the "last days". He would have them informed of the last days and the events that would unfold then. Does this not underscore the importance of events in the last days?

That is something all fathers should note.

"But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these," Daniel 2:28.

Here again we see the importance of the last days. Significant events, which began with Nebuchadnezzar and would culminate in the manifestation of Christ's kingdom on earth at His return, are revealed to the king in the mysterious dream that he had. Daniel is God's instrument in revealing to the Babylonian monarch just what his dream meant.

That took place some two and a half millennia ago and yet back then the topic of the last days was contemplated by God's people.

Please consider then . . .

### **I. ALL SCRIPTURE IS GIVEN US BY DIVINE INSPIRATION FOR OUR BENEFIT THROUGH STUDY.**

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness," 2 Timothy 3:16.

#### **Rightly Divide**

We profit from God's Word by studying it, being acquainted with it, heeding it and obeying it. See what Paul said to Timothy in verse 1 of 2 Timothy 3. "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." The events of the last days are to be included in our studies since they are part of the inspired revelation. The nature of our study is also set forth by Paul. "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth," 2 Timothy 2:15. We are to rightly divide God's Word. The phrase means to "cut straight". Many an incorrect cut has been made in the study of prophecy, resulting in all sorts of foolish notions being propagated.

We must seek to avoid this by remembering that we are dealing with the holy and inspired Word of the Living God and by observing the simple rule of Bible hermeneutics - that a literal interpretation of God's Word is ever to be followed except where it is obviously figurative. God means what He says and says what He means. Bishop Hooper said: "Where a literal interpretation will stand, the farthest from the literal

is generally the worst.”

I agree with the following statement on the matter issued by the Sovereign Grace Advent Testimony. “We adhere to the principle of receiving the Word of God in its literal sense, except where obviously figurative, and in so receiving Prophetic Truth, emphasise the fact that this enhances, and does not diminish, experimental enjoyment of the Doctrine of Grace, also so learned.”

**1. It may surprise some to hear that eschatology, the study of the last things, dominates the subject matter of the Bible.**

From the beginning of time, believers studied the second coming of Christ and all that related to it. That is clear from the fragment of Enoch’s ministry that has been recorded and preserved for us, Jude 14-15.

“And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him,” Jude, 14-15.

Just think on this for a moment. That generation which included Adam, for he lived for some 243 years after Enoch’s walk with God began and died only some 57 years before Enoch’s translation, heard preaching on the second coming of Christ. Consequently, we can say with some measure of confidence that Adam would have heard Enoch teaching this very truth regarding the coming of the Lord and the generation of lawless rebels the Saviour would come to judge. Is it not thought-provoking that the first generation of men should, it would appear, have given more consideration to the second coming than is apparently the case with this generation of believers?

From that time on, this subject dominates the Bible. It has been the prophets’ subject since time began. Hear what Peter said. “Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of

all his holy prophets since the world began," Acts 3:21.

Ought we not therefore to give great attention to this wonderful subject?

**2. Indeed, you cannot make sense of the Bible without a right understanding of prophecy. All Christ has done and will do is in accordance with prophecy.**

"Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil, Matthew 5:17.

You cannot understand the purpose of Christ amongst men without an understanding of the prophets and what it is they said of His person and purpose, His first and second comings. "To him give all the prophets witness," Acts 10:43. So said Peter. We must study the Old as well as the New Testament if we are to learn all that has been revealed to us about Christ.

There is a silly notion that what is written in the New Testament is of greater authority and merit than that which is contained in the Old Testament. And yet, all that the Saviour said or did was to be validated by the record of the prophets. The New Testament record would have no authority if it were not for the Old Testament's accreditation of Christ.

**3. Ignorance of prophecy is dangerous.**

Was it not the failure of the Jews to believe the prophets that led to their rejection of Christ? "And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers," Acts 3:17. "Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre. But God raised him from the dead: And he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to

Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you," Acts 13:26-41.

Here is a question for you: ". . . Believest thou the prophets?" Acts 26:27. The challenge of the gospel remains the same - "Do you believe what the prophets say about Christ? Was it not the slowness to believe the prophets which led the early believers into folly and reduced them to confusion and despair? "Then he said unto them, O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken," Luke 24:25.

Neglect of the prophetic scriptures will lead to the same folly and confusion, as overtook the disciples at Calvary, overtaking us as we enter upon the conflicts and challenges of the apostasy of the last days.

That same ignorance will blind men and women and rob them of readiness for the great and terrible day of the Lord. "This second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance: that ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles

of the Lord and Saviour: knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:1-4.

We must be "mindful," knowledgeable of the teaching of God's Word regarding the last days lest we fall victim to the devil's deceptions.

**II. IF THE BELIEVERS IN THE 1st CENTURY WERE  
REQUIRED TO WATCH FOR CHRIST'S RETURN THEN WE OF  
THE 21st CENTURY ARE MUCH MORE OBLIGATED TO DO  
SO.**

Believers in the first century AD were expected to watch for Christ's return. We have already noticed that it was a feature of the faith of the converts in Thessalonica, 1 Thessalonians 1:10. But it was not just there that such a looking for Christ's return marked the believers. "So that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 1:7. "For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ," Philippians 3:20. "Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ," Titus 2:13. "So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation," Hebrews 9:28.

These are but a few of the verses which set forth the attitude regarding the Saviour's return in the early church.

**1. A call to watch is amongst the last words of Christ.**

"Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come," Matthew 24:42. "Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh," Matthew 25:13. Ought not they to be of special significance?

**2. Forgetfulness of Christ's return leads to worldliness amongst the professing church.**

"But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord de-

layeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellow servants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," Matthew 24:48-51.

The Saviour teaches us in this parable that the acceptance of the notion that the Saviour's return is not something to be kept ever before us indicates that worldliness and backsliding have gained dominance in the church.

I strongly believe that the sad indifference to the holy topic of Christ's return and the teaching of the Bible regarding the last days is linked inextricably to the general worldliness that is manifested amongst the people of God today.

### **3. Forgetfulness leads to unfaithfulness amongst preachers.**

Consider these scriptures. "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad. Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men," 2 Corinthians 5:10-11.

"I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine," 2 Timothy 4:1-2.

In both of these passages it is very clear that bearing in mind the truth of the Saviour's return and the account that believers must give on that occasion are a great incentive to faithfulness in service. It surely must follow that should this great event slip to the back of our minds then the incentive to faithfulness likewise disappears.

Again, I believe that such a consideration is very relevant, given the state of the pulpit ministry of the modern church. The preaching of God's Word in zeal and power has been

replaced by a spirit of entertainment and worldly grandiose schemes that turn the church service into a stage, a circus. It used to be said that God's servants were sent to feed the sheep, not entertain the goats.

It is still true though sadly overlooked!

#### **4. Forgetfulness breeds defiance amongst sinners.**

Woe unto the world when it forgets the truth of the return of Christ!

Are not the last days, with their apostasy and lawlessness, days in which men will scoff at the truth of Christ's return? "Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation," 2 Peter 3:3-4.

As a consciousness of Christ's return and His wrath against sinners subsides so there is a corresponding increase in defiant rejection of the gospel and lack of reverence for the things of God.

### **III. THE TIME OF HIS RETURN IS NEAR AT HAND.**

Something approaching 6000 years have passed over this earth. Allowing for the necessary margin of error in any calculation of the true date, we believe that we are not far from the seventh millennium. Given the place that seven periods of time have in the order of God, it is not unreasonable to assume that the earth's Sabbath of rest, the Millennial Reign of Christ, will soon dawn. We surely can say, "Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh," James 5:8. "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer," 1 Peter 4:7. "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed," Romans 13:11.

This being so:

## **1. A right understanding of prophecy is vital to believers as we face the approach of the rise of the Antichrist.**

The Saviour warns of deception surrounding His second coming. "And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you," Matthew 24:4.

There has always been deception surrounding this matter. One reason for it is the fact that much regarding prophecy of the last days was "sealed" by God until the time to which it referred drew near. Consider Daniel's request and the Lord's response in Daniel 12:8-10. "And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand." "The words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end." That statement is very important. The words "closed up" and "sealed" indicate a divine closing up of this matter and restricting it from human comprehension. This was to be until a certain time - "the time of the end." Whenever that time is, it is then that God will open the seal upon these things and an understanding of God's Word be granted. A foreshadowing of this event may be seen in the book of Daniel. Daniel tells us in chapter 9, verse 2 that: "In the first year of his reign I Daniel understood by books the number of the years, whereof the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, that he would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem."

The prophet Jeremiah had stated this truth regarding the 70 years of exile some 70 years before. Jeremiah 25:11 reads: "And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years."

Daniel must have heard of and likely read these words of Jeremiah for he was a contemporary of the prophet and yet he was not granted understanding of the significance of the words until many years later. The word "understand" in Daniel 9:2 means to "perceive or discern."

In like manner, the details of the visions recorded in the book of Daniel and the other end-time prophecies will become clear to the people of God as the time of the end draws near.

Despite this divine embargo, many commentators have ventured to give an interpretation of end-time prophecy and they have been the means of propagating many false and erroneous views regarding the end times.

For centuries, some 1500 years indeed, many have believed notions regarding the events at the end of this age that were based upon a system of interpretation advanced by a man called Origen. Basically, Origen, in the 3rd century, taught that the means of interpreting prophecy was to see it figuratively. The meaning was not to be found in a literal understanding of such terms as "Zion", "Jerusalem" and "Israel" but in understanding these words to have a spiritual meaning. Thus "Zion" became a reference to the Church etc. In this manner the true sense of prophecy was largely lost.

But in the 19th century there was a rediscovering of a right understanding of these matters, a return to the interpretation of the days of the apostles.

There is ample proof in the extant writings of the early church to show that the methods and views introduced by Origen in the 3rd century and adopted by many of the later commentators, and still held by many today under the method of prophetic interpretation known as "Amillennialism", were not the views of the early church.

In the middle of the 19th century, men such as Andrew and Horatius Bonar, Benjamin Wills Newton and others who followed in their steps began, Luther-like, to cast off the errors of centuries and set forth the teaching of God's prophetic truth in a simple and literal fashion and once again God's Word shone forth with light for these dark times.

## **2. Grace is promised to the righteous so that they can understand the unfolding prophecies.**

"Many shall be purified, and made white, and tried; but the

wicked shall do wickedly: and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand," Daniel 12:10. The wise will understand, that is, perceive and comprehend. Grace will be given them to do so.

The last days are days of delusion. "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie: that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness," 2 Thessalonians 2:7-12. Just as there were those in Jerusalem at the time of the first advent who had understanding of the times and were waiting for the appearing of the Messiah, so such grace will be granted to believers in the days just prior to the Saviour's return. Simeon, of whom we read in Luke chapter 2, was just such a man. He was aware of the nearing of the time of Messiah's coming. Anna, a prophetess, was another to whom such grace was given.

Both of these saints of God were conscious of the approach of the first advent and there were others too in Jerusalem at that time as Luke 2:25-26, 36-38 shows. "And, behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; and the same man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel: and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord's Christ. . . . And there was one Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Aser: she was of a great age, and had lived with an husband seven years from her virginity; and she was a widow of about fourscore and four years, which departed not from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. And she coming in that instant gave thanks likewise unto the Lord, and spake of him to all them that looked for

redemption in Jerusalem.”

It behoves us to watch and pray and search the scriptures daily as the time draws near.

**3. God’s Word has ever been the means by which the believer has been kept from error and sin.**

“The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes,” Psalm 19:8.

“O send out thy light and thy truth: let them lead me; let them bring me unto thy holy hill, and to thy tabernacles,” Psalm 43:3.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path,” Psalm 119:105.

“We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts,” 2 Peter 1:19.

Here is incentive enough for us to apply ourselves humbly to the study of God’s Word in times such as these.